

Research Rocks

As I've said and written many times, the marketing umbrella covers a number of disciplines, the creation and placement of advertising products only one. One of the most overlooked and undervalued services under that broad term "marketing" is research. Without sound research and assessment, no amount of clever advertising messages or awesome graphics will help your business thrive and grow. Of course, from the client's perspective, research is not as much "fun" to fund as cool, tangible products, but it's absolutely essential. Done right, it will pay for itself rapidly. Research should ideally be part of a comprehensive strategic marketing plan, but if you have not opted to strategically market your business, you should at least insist that your advertising or marketing firm provide the logic behind the recommendations they make to you.

Here are some bare-bones research vehicles to consider before any marketing (advertising/sales/PR/cause-related marketing/promotions) is undertaken:

Company Snapshot

From positioning to brand personality, and much more in between, your marketing firm or ad agency needs to make determinations and recommendations about your company on paper before any work begins.

Assessment Report of the Company's Brand

Does your company have an established brand? Does the current branding deliver on its promise? Guarantee authenticity? Provide a reliable and consistent customer experience? Effectively tap into your customer's vision of what he may need or what he may want?

Technology Report

"If you build a website they will come" is not necessarily true. Is your website all it can be in terms of design, performance, customer retention, efficiency? Is it optimized to encourage higher search engine placement? Gone are the days when a website was a stand-alone brochure (called "brochureware" in our industry). Today, your company's website must back-up your marketing efforts 100 per cent while assisting with PR, sales promos, catalog itemization, order-taking and more.

Competitive Landscape Report

Who is selling products & services similar to your company's, and how much are they selling them for? How are they packaging their products or services? Who is emerging on the horizon with the newest, most advanced version of your product or service? Your agency or marketing firm will need to know this to formulate product differentiation tactics.

Target Market Profiling

Unless you know can identify the age, income, marital status, educational level, and other demographics that characterize your target market, you and your marketing company will have no idea how best to sell your products and services to them. When we say “target” we mean your *best opportunity* to sell...your best chance. How many times we have asked clients, “Who is your target?” only to be told, “Everyone!” Unless you have an unlimited marketing budget (and who does?), marketing to “everyone” is out of the question.

Creative Logic

How will the advertising or marketing firm brand your business (or simply create a single campaign toward branding), and what is the logic or intelligence behind it? Good creative is more than looking or sounding “cool.”

Remember, it makes good sense to spend a few dollars upfront on intelligent research to ensure your marketing & advertising R.O.I.